

Special Address

HRD FOR IMPROVING THE INDIAN TELECOM' S GOVERNANCE*

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OVERVIEW

This excellent conference has already discussed the HR needs of the Indian telecom and IT industry, with the important theme of "Empowering the e-wave minds". So, I propose to focus in this address on the need for HRD at the ministry level, so that these empowered e-wave minds of India can fly; and not get bogged down and frustrated due to a hostile or unhelpful environment.

Governance Model

The Telecom Restructuring Committee, 1991, which I had the privilege to chair, recommended a triangle model of governance, with the following three vertices.

- i. **Operations** — The Telecom-IT Market as the top vertex, consisting of the customers, service providers, manufacturers, technology firms, etc.
- ii. **Regulation** — As independent, quasi-judicial regulator, to apply the regulations; resolve emerging issues; advise government, etc.
- iii. **Policy** — Government, including, specifically the concerned Ministries to be the third vertex, concerned only with the Telecom-IT policy role.

Reform Progress

There has been a fair amount of cumulative telecom reform. But it has been slower than expected; and in a sub-optimal sequence, with very high opportunity cost for the Indian economy, in terms of export earnings; GDP growth; FDI; jobs; and customer satisfaction. The ideal sequence would have been to begin with the following –

- a. Corporatisation of the non-MTNL part of all the DoT Operations. Its continuing restructuring; management contracts with private sector; and eventual privatisation.
- b. Similar management contracts; and privatisation of MTNL and VSNL.

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- c. Setting up the TRAI; and the MoC working in warm cooperation with it, avoiding all turf disputes and court cases.
- d. In parallel, embrace, and not just tolerate, Indian private and foreign investment in basic, paging, cellular, WAP and all emerging technologies.

However, it is a matter for satisfaction that the agenda of reform of the Athreya Committee, 1991, was completed with the creation of the massive Bhaarat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. this year. It could have been done in 4 years, with *satva guna*, refinement and maturity. Instead, it has been done in 9 years, with *tamas*, low energy; and *rajas*, feverish protection of sectional goals, over national interest. But better late than never.

Governance HRD

India has fallen behind China's NII, National information infrastructure. It needs to catch up, with visions of first 100 million DELs; going to 150 million; and 200 million lines or equivalents, in the changing technologies. The following kinds of HRD interventions need to be considered.

- i. Wind up the Telecom Commission. It has performed its historic role.
- ii. Have a single Department of Telecom, to advise the Minister and Cabinet on telecom policy formulation, legislation, implementation and control.
- iii. Stop further recruitment to the ITS, Indian telecommunications service. Train the existing officers to assume and excel in their new managerial roles in the BSNL and the booming private sector.
- iv. Benchmark the new DoT, globally, with similar national telecom ministries and departments, identify gaps, fill them, with training in relevant competences, to make the Department a worthy instrument to serve and emerging world leader in telecoms and IT.
- v. Prepare the DoT and the other concerned departments of the GoI for the coming age of convergence.

Conclusion

We now have an India Vision of being one of the three largest national economies of the 21st century. The Telecom/Information base is a key infrastructure, needed to achieve that vision. The new DoT/MoC has an important catalytic role to play. It should extricate itself from any operating roles and *dharma sankats*. Both the IT industry and the ministry should guard against complacency on their new-found status as India's leading exporters, with a target of \$50 billion by 2008. There is a constructive competitive threat, from, surprise, the Indian textile industry, looking at exports of \$50 billion dollars by 2010!
